FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, Eds.
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REVIEWED BY JOANNA SWANGER

The twelve contributors to this volume are responding to a lack of published research about how feminist international relations (IR) research is conducted. They present conversations between feminist IR and non-feminist IR methods, and methodologies for feminist IR. Because "feminist research cannot be reduced to a particular normative orientation or political, ideological agenda," the unifying thread comes in the research questions and the theoretical methodologies. The collection offers some valuable discussions of great relevance for the intersections between feminism and IR: J. Ann Tickner presents a concise overview of the importance of post-positivist methodologies; the Tickner-Keohane debate is presented; and Fiona Robinson, Brooke A. Ackerly and Jacqui True enter squarely into debates over feminist normative theory and constructs of justice within citizenship regimes that have not yet recognized the hazards of alleging neutrality and uniformity. The most interesting of these larger discussions woven throughout is the debate among the contributors about standpoint theory. S. Laurel Weldon, whose chapter might be redundant of earlier efforts but is nevertheless important to include, makes the case for a collectivist feminist IR grounded in standpoint theory. Tami Jacoby, on the other hand, whose original question concerned whether and how women's definitions of security in Israel differed from those of men, argues that "the feminist standpoint perspective and its concomitant notion of a unified category of 'woman' disintegrate when the concept of experience is employed as a unit of analysis in feminist IR fieldwork." Meanwhile, Maria Stern, who explored Mayan women's discourses of (in)security in Guatemala, tried making use of standpoint theory but found that its epistemology, "although tempting in its politics, fell short in reflecting the relationship between the discursive practice of security and the construction of identities." Stern argues that the categories of "human" and of "individual," both still so unquestionably "solid" within dominant IR discourse, become very unstable "when questions are asked around identity and embodiment"; as a result, Mayan women's discourses of (in)security transgressed all the neat subdivisions within IR.

The authors are most successful when they refuse received wisdom and tidy categories. Bina D'Costa, for example, centres the marginalized subject, in this case the survivors of gender-based violence during and after Bangladesh's Independence War, in an attempt to achieve "otherwise inaccessible theoretical insights to the question of nation-building"; but one suspects even greater insights might be achieved without such heavy reliance on Peter Leonard's (1984) concept of marginalization, which defines as marginalized all those who are outside "the major arena of capitalist productive and reproductive activity." Similarly, Annica Kronsell's investigation of the gendering of the Swedish military demonstrates how "the well-trodden research terrain of the military changes when hegemonic masculinity is exposed in its barracks"; but this would have been a richer study had she problematized the relation between the military as institution and the field of IR itself and offered a gender analysis of precisely this relation. Carol Cohn's chapter on gender in the Pentagon is a most excellent treatment on method, for she adopts a standard IR style of narrative and grammar but subverts it, so the reader is lulled into thinking that Cohn is always just about to share conclusions from her research; instead, the chapter is an elaborate unfolding of the process of research itself, one that is full of insights and ripe for classroom discussion. The contributions by Marysia Zalewski and Christine Sylvester do the most to disrupt the claims to staid authoritativeness by non-feminist IR. Zalewski's influences are Foucauldian genealogy, the Derridean emphasis on "spectral secrets" and "hauntology," Avery Gordon's (2001) emphasis on haunting and the sociological imagination, the strategies of Luce Irigaray, and Patti Lather's (2001) "methodology of mess." Zalewski presents Keohane's insistence on IR's fealty to the "alleged objectivity of the natural sciences" as a puzzle, given that natural scientists "long ago gave up the idea of the production of clean knowledge and the idea of a 'real world' of unsullied objects and data." Her analysis artfully criticizes a discipline "heavily weighed down by heavily guarded institutional memory/amnesia—as well as anaesthesia." Sylvester's chapter on the relevance of the fine arts for IR complements Zalewski's perfectly, especially in her argument that the art of IR, such as international diplomacy, "where talking is ubiquitous but nothing is really being said," and such as all the neat categorizations most often so carefully removed from quotidian life, finds its most apt metaphor in the art form of still life: "We realize the sacrifices in meaning that accompany our efforts to cut out excess and strive for the parsimonious, made-to-look-uncluttered painterly processes. We can thereby characterize the invisibles, whether these are missing handmaids [women, typically absent from IR and still life] or elements of colonial production."

This carefully conceived collection is a significant contribution to the fields of IR and of feminist IR specifically. With regard to the latter, the editors write of the "ironic posi-

tion of writing a definitive text for a field that eschews definition," but Zalewski aptly summarizes the value of the effort of this book: "Perhaps telling the story of feminist methodology lies in narrating the process of the search for it, and the practice of it, which, although demanding responsibility, does not allow the comfort of finality or the production of 'comfort texts.'"

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SEX AND FAMILY IN COLONIAL INDIA

Durba Ghosh
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REVIEWED BY ANINDO HAZRA

In *Sex and Family in Colonial India*, Durba Ghosh problematizes the received knowledge of a "collaborative" late-eighteenth-century Company-Raj transformed into a "coercive" nineteenth-century entity. She makes porous the conventional categorization of the eighteenth-century as a time of open interracial sexual relations and of wider cross-cultural exchanges between East and West. Ghosh argues against a Golden Age of co-operation between "coloniser" and "colonised" giving way neatly to Mutiny-era repression and estrangement. According to her, the subcontinent of the former period is as much a site of anxious negotiations over identity and alterity, in both public and domestic realms, as one of harems and hookahs: the colonial state is already "in formation." The elliptical quality of that phrase captures well the muddy reality that, notwithstanding "the process of 'making empire respectable,'" the state faced, repeatedly yet reluctantly, hybrid families made up of British men and local women.[1] In colonial archives, Ghosh's material of choice, these local women are often consigned to anonymity and a fleeting presence.[2] Encountering these tangential references, Ghosh uses Jenny Sharpe to make the case that "a sensitive reading of female subjectivity and agency 'raises the possibility of action without negating the unequal relations of power that restrict the ability to act.'"

Building on the premise that colonial records located women in interracial relationships but kept them in abeyance, Ghosh points out that, while "indigenous household members became objects of the colonial state's concern" and "were made into subjects by the colonial social and legal order," some women were able in turn to make "themselves into subjects" by "negotiating financial provisions, gaining legal privileges, and expressing their [individual] cultural and religious affiliations," from the colonial government.[3] Ghosh is quick, however, to caution the reader against "the facile conclusion that colonialism or the intimate activities it gave rise to benefited native women;" at best, there were "limited social, material and legal opportunities for native women, allowing them some mobility within positions of relative powerlessness." The dialectic of woman subjected and woman subjectivising serves as the core of Ghosh's endeavours: hers is a flexible theory that takes into account the power of the colonial state to disable resistance and "make native women illegible" but also emphasises that "colonial companions [...] did act to defend their interests, particularly when the colonial regime was unsure of its policies." State power is not monolithic, but neither can it be (completely) undermined.

Ghosh also examines the ways in which British men in interracial relationships responded to the regime of respectable colonial conduct in archival documents like their wills.[4] A wide range of upper-middle-class and middle-class men inscribe there a keenness to remain what Ghosh calls "good patriarchs" by ensuring their native companions' financial security. However, these same documents often contain specific instructions about the European education of their mixed-race children, a process usually involving the separation of child from mother, demonstrating, as she points out, the "many anxieties about hybridity and degeneration that threatened to undermine British superiority and the 'national character.'" Less than unconventional, these "patriarchs" were very aware of (mono)racial and social status both in India and Europe. Reading the wills of working-class men or lower-ranking soldiers, however, Ghosh finds a "relative absence of social anxiety based on racial and gender awareness of their superiority over native women" owing, she argues, to their poor material conditions and consequent exclusion from the emergent ruling class.

The careful combining of race, class, and gender adds critical weight to Ghosh's work, but the effort is somewhat undone by the lack of a clear engagement with desire, interracial or otherwise, beyond heterosexuality: her subjects are almost exclusively British men and native women.[5] Even if colonial material like archives relating to marriage, childbirth, widows, and orphans are already rooted in heteronormativity, Ghosh could have attended to the hetero-limits of her study in an extended passage or note. In a paragraph concerning "[f]riendships among men," one of the few references in the volume to a same-sex scenario, there is no exploration of even the possibility of homosexual desire. Ghosh simply argues that English male "networks" sustained British control in the subcontinent. While her point is noteworthy, Ghosh could have drawn attention to the sexual